



Canoe Safety

Set aside as a Wild and Scenic River for its outstanding scenery and recreational opportunities, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway includes the St. Croix River, and its primary tributary, the Namekagon. The rivers offer outstanding canoeing in a picturesque setting. River conditions can vary from fast moving currents with waves up to 3 feet high to slower moving currents with a few riffles and obstructions. Advance planning will assure a safe and enjoyable canoe trip. Talk with a park ranger at one of the Riverway visitor centers to learn about river conditions and hazards you may encounter. Refer to National Park Service river section maps, camping, and hiking bulletins for complete information on facilities, transportation, regulations, fishing and hiking. Trip planning information is available on the Riverway website: www.nps.gov/sacn/index.html.

Planning a Canoe Trip

When planning your trip do not forget to take into consideration:

River currents:

The average speed for the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers is three miles per hour. However, some stretches of river can be slower or faster. Experienced canoers can travel faster than beginners.

Wind conditions:

A strong upstream wind can mean standing waves and can slow down your rate of speed.

Portages:

Portages are located on river section maps. Know where they are and be prepared for them.

Canoeing difficulty:

Make sure you know the abilities of each paddler in your group. Normal conditions are Class I on the International Scale of River Difficulty. However, during periods of high water, classifications can reach Class II and Class III on some stretches.

Scheduled breaks:

Are you planning on picnicking, or fishing along the way? These activities add time to your trip and may require you to shorten the length of river you travel.

Water level:

High water in spring or low water levels in summer can make canoeing impossible on some stretches of the river. Picking an alternative stretch of river is possible. Information about river conditions are available at each of the Riverway visitor centers. Current water levels are listed on the Riverway website at: www.nps.gov/sacn/trip/river_levels.html.

Float Plan:

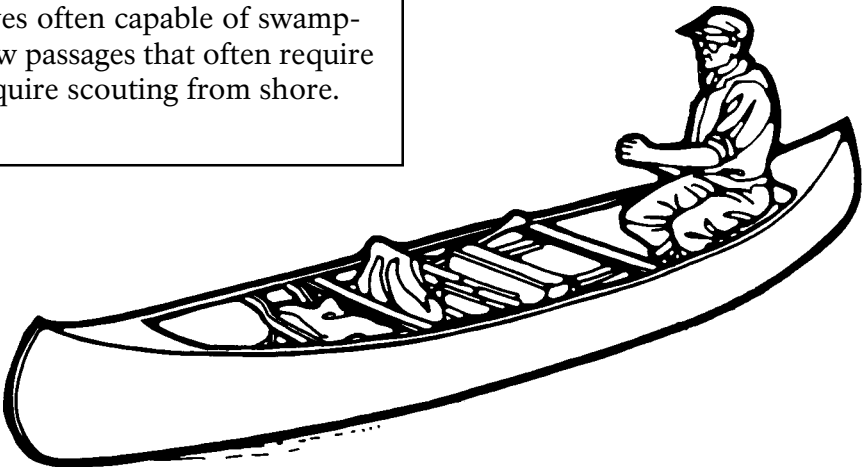
Put-in and take-out plans should be left with someone who will contact authorities if you are overdue. The establishment of a late return phone number is an important way to inform others of your location.

Hypothermia:

Exposure to cool air or cold water temperatures can lead to hypothermia. Dress appropriately.

International Scale of River Difficulty

- Class I** Moving water with a few riffles and small waves. Few or no obstructions.
- Class II** Easy rapids with waves up to 3 feet and wide, clear, channels that are obvious without scouting. Some maneuvering is required.
- Class III** Rapids with high, irregular waves often capable of swamping in open bow canoes. Narrow passages that often require complex maneuvering. May require scouting from shore.



Equipment

Make sure you have all the proper equipment before you begin your trip. Some suggested gear includes:

- ___ Life jackets (the law requires one for each person)

___ Childrens life jacket (Coast Guard approved)

___ Paddles (1 for each person plus 1 extra for the canoe)

___ Garbage bags

___ Toilet paper and spade

___ Food and food storage equipment

___ Change of clothing in waterproof container

___ First aid kit

___ Drinking water

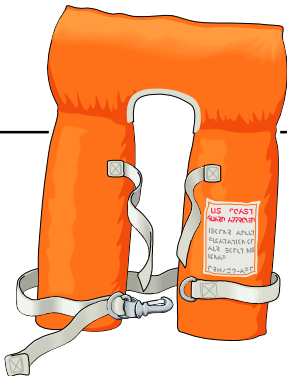
___ Water-proof matches

___ Insect repellent

___ Sunscreen

___ Rain gear

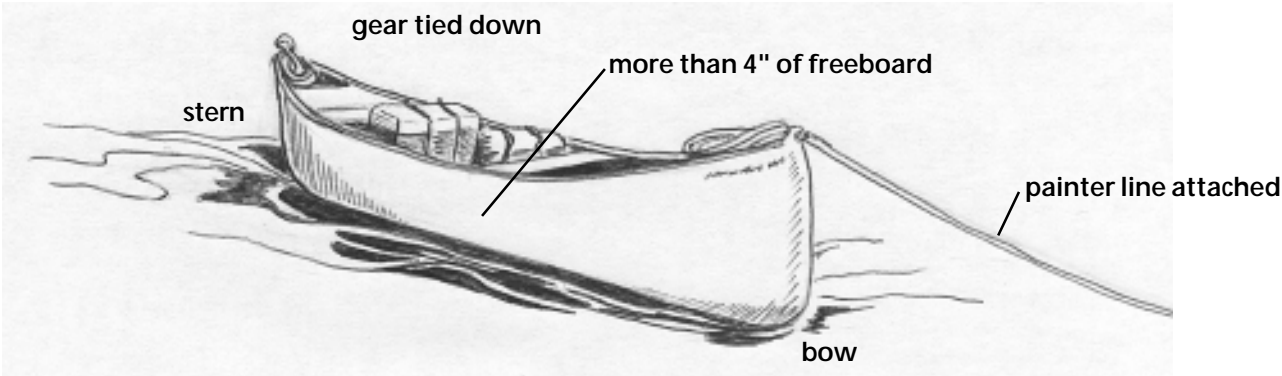
___ Water bailer



Before You Start

Make sure your equipment is in working condition. A painter line should be attached to all canoes. Secure all equipment to the canoe to prevent shifting loads or loss in case of tipping. A canoe is considered overloaded if it has less then 4 inches of freeboard.

Check the local weather forecast. Storms can move in fast. Check the water levels and the water temperature. You can obtain general information at any of the Riverway visitor centers.



Canoeing Safety Tips

Wearable personal floatation devices (PFD's), or life jackets, are required onboard for each person. Seat cushions are no longer legal. PFD's should fit properly, otherwise they will ride up over the shoulders and could come off. **Never** tie or strap a person or their PFD to a canoe.

Children under 13 years of age must wear a properly fitting life jacket while your vessel is moving. On the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers, motor boats, canoes, kayaks, and inner tubes are considered vessels. The National Park Service encourages all people who spend time on the water to wear a life jacket.

- Kneel in the bottom of the canoe while in areas of rough water for stability.
- Water ripples mean that rocks lie dangerously close to the surface. Follow the smooth water shaped like a "V" pointing down stream.
- If you fall out of a canoe keep your feet above the surface, kicking and backpaddling to control your course downstream. Never attempt to hold a canoe from the downstream side.
- If you capsize, stay upstream of your canoe. Your canoe will float.
- Always follow the easiest route.

- Keep the bow headed down stream with the current; if the canoe is sideways it will tip if it strikes a wave or rock.
- **Never** stand or change positions in a canoe while afloat.
- In areas of high motorboat traffic, canoe near the shore and head into the wakes to avoid capsizing.
- Don't canoe near dams. The reversal current can suck you back in towards the dam.
- Do not lash canoes together. Many river channels are too narrow to allow passage.

Riverway Visitor Centers

National Park Rangers can answer questions and help you plan your trip. Bookstores are located in each visitor center and offer publications about canoeing.

The St. Croix Visitor Center is closed for construction in 2004. However, you can contact a park ranger at:

St. Croix Visitor Center
P.O. Box 708
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024
(715) 483-3284 ext. 638

Namekagon Visitor Center
P.O. Box 100
Trego, WI 54888
(715) 635-8346

Or visit our website at:
www.nps.gov/sacn/index.html.

